



## **Stranger things: Dark Reflections season 2 by Dark Lord of Hodor**

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**Summary:** It has been three months since El, the powerful, otherworldly reflection of Will Byers, helped the young teen escape the upside down, but their troubles have only just begun, one of the biggest of them being Mike's girlfriend, Eleven, who vehemently refuses to trust the entity within Will's mind. But there are greater threats to Hawkins than the clash of angry, Psychic Children.

# 1. Chapter 1

El was restless: Will could tell.

It had been over a month since he had been pulled into the nightmare-world known as 'the upside down', and he still he found himself on edge.

The things that had once been normal, everyday fare to him now seemed alien and unrelatable.

The sound of car horns

Of children playing

Even of dogs barking and birds chirping.

None of it did anything for Will, save to put him on edge.

In a moment of sadness, he realized that he could never have his world back again.

It was forever lost, Just like the Will Byers that had been taken by the monster.

He sighed, and mentally steeled himself.

The old Will was gone for good, so now it was time to embrace the new one.

*'It's not easy'* said El

Will peddled his bike, enjoying the sun on his face.

*'Letting go, I mean'*

Swerving to avoid a fallen-over trashcan, Will took a little-used dirt path that would take him- well, 'them' -to Mike's house.

'I just wanted things to go back to normal' he said.

El was silent for a moment.

*'At least you had a good normal to remember'*

Will suddenly felt guilty for being selfish.

El had grown up being beaten and abused by cold, unempathetic men in white coats, and no one had been there to rescue him.

The two spent the rest of trip in silence.

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El could feel something nearby:

Something powerful.

Something familiar.

She had been living with Jim for close to a year now, and despite his obsession with security, she still managed to sneak out and see Mike from time to time, even though the risk of doing so was great.

The young girl had helped Jim locate Misses Byers' lost Son Will in the bad world -the 'upside down' as Mike and his friends had called it-, and after the rescue, the Man had thanked her, and given her extra ego's and freedom's for a time.

But it was obvious that something had happened there: something that had shaken Hopper, and while she was loath to intrude on the thoughts of the Man she had come to see as 'Father', her brief, surface-level examinations had revealed a tiny glimpse of three figures flying through the air, one of them being him.

It made no sense at all.

Unless...

Jane shoved down her last ego, opened the window in her room, and climbed outside, carefully closing it behind her.

The powerful presence she had sensed was on the move, and it was one she had felt before in her terrifying mental forays into the upside down:

A consciousness that, unlike the horrifying master of that world, had seemed surprisingly intelligent, and even more surprisingly of ill temperament towards the monsters that inhabited the nightmarish place.

How it had gotten here, into the normal world was a troubling thought: one that only investigation could put to rest.

Taking off in the direction that the psychic emanations seemed to be going in, El steeled herself for the inevitable fight.

Whatever it was, she was going to confront it, and if it threatened Mike or her friends, it was going to die.

## 2. Chapter 2

'...In 1905, Albert Einstein published his theory of special relativity. Who can tell me what exactly this theory entails?'

Mike wasn't hearing any of Mr. Clarke's words. It had been three months since Will had come back from the upside down, and he hadn't been back to school since.

The last time they had spoken, he had refused to talk about what he had seen there. Later, El had said that the place was 'rotten' in typical, cryptic fashion, but the only other thing that he could get out of her were the same words she had used to describe the fake DOE facility where she had been held:

'Bad place'.

Deep down in the pit of his stomach, Mike had the awful, sinking feeling that Will had suffered terribly...and a fear that said suffering had changed his friend irrevocably.

Lucas and Dustin sat beside him, both looking equally distracted by their 'own' glumness.

**Ding!**

The bell finally rang, and the class began to stampede out the door, laughing and yelling in a dense cacophony of voices.

'Alright guys: remember my question! There 'will' be a quiz on it tomorrow...'

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'Maybe we should go by his house' said Lucas hopefully, as the boys stood by their bikes.

'Yeah!' said Dustin. 'Maybe his Mom'll have more chocolate cake this-Owe!'

Lucas had hit him in the shoulder.

'I don't really think he wants to be around anybody right now' said Mike, sadly. 'He wouldn't even tell 'me' what happened to him when he was...'

The three were silent for a moment, both saddened and frustrated at their inability to help their friend.

'Let's just meet up later' said Mike. 'I'm going home'

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The massive energy signature was moving fast. Faster than El could physically keep up with.

Luckily, the powerful psychic didn't 'need' to keep pace with her target: her evolved senses could track anyone for miles, and judging by the direction it was taking, she doubted that it was going very far.

In fact, it seemed to be headed towards town.

The young girl took a breath, closed her eyes, and exhaled slowly: a calming technique which, as she had discovered years ago, helped passively amplify her abilities for a time.

This thing was from the 'upside down', as Mike had called it, and nothing good came from that place.

Furthermore, it obviously had a purpose in Hawkins, and that wasn't something she could allow.

Not when it posed a potential risk to Mike and his friends, and not when the lives of so many others were at stake.

Finally making it out of the woods, El spotted a bicycle, leaned up against the side of a house.

After checking to see that the coast was clear, she quickly made a beeline for it, jumped on, and began peddling, silently thanking Mike for having taught her to ride.

Now she could follow the monster in earnest: and kill it before it could carry out its mission.

### 3. Chapter 3

*'When are we going to go and find this other me? You can visit with your friend anytime!'*

Will rolled his eyes. As much as he wanted to meet with the other El and hopefully get some answers from her, his psychic twin was starting to get on his nerves.

'I haven't even 'talked' to Mike in almost a month! Do you want me to just tell him to screw off?'

'Yes!' said El enthusiastically.

Will clenched his fists against the handlebars of his bike and gritted his teeth. He had to remind himself sometimes that El had never had a friend in his life.

*'There's no such thing as a 'friend', Will'* he said darkly, having read his host's thoughts.

The boy slammed on his brakes, coming to a sliding stop on the dirt road.

'How the hell would you know?!' he fired back. 'I've known Mike my whole life, you asshole! I would stand up for him no matter what!'

The chirping of the birds had stopped, and Will realized that he had been yelling out loud.

*'And what makes you think he would do the same for you, huh!?''*

'We've stood up for each other lots of times!' he said, breathing heavily in anger.

But El wouldn't back down.

*'Really? And what has 'he' stood up for you for?'*

'When Troy and his asshole friend wouldn't leave me alone!' he yelled back.



'And?'

Will threw his bike down, stomping off to the side of the little-used backwoods road.

'When other kids called me queer!'

Silence.

Then:

*'That's it? Some other kids were shit heads to you and this 'Mike' told them to go to hell?'*

He laughed.

'Stop it!' said Will.

'No' El replied, venomously. *'I'm not going to stop: You need to hear this'*

*'The first time someone holds a gun to his face, or gets between you and him, or gives a choice between his life or yours: he'll choose himself'*

'FUCK YOU!' the boy yelled, angrily hitting the ground with his fist. 'It's not the world's fault that you got kicked and ra-!'

***'YOU SHUT UP! YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING! YOU NEVER WATCHED A MOTHER THROW HER FIVE YEAR OLD SON TO FLESH EATING MONSTERS, JUST TO BUY HER WORTHLESS ASS SOME TIME! WERE 'THEY' FRIENDS?! YOU NEVER WATCHED TWO BROTHERS KILL EACH OTHER OVER A LITTLE BIT OF FOOD BECAUSE THEY WERE STARVING! WERE 'THEY' FRIENDS?! HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK YOUR 'FRIENDSHIP CAN TAKE BEFORE-'***

Suddenly, Will was flying through the air.

As he collided painfully with a tree on the other side of the road, a girl stepped out of the woods, her face a mask of fury.

'Tha-that's her!' said Will, standing shakily. 'That's-'

-*'Jane?!'* finished El, speaking through Will's mouth once again. *'But*

***How?! HOW?!'***

The girl stopped for a moment and stared in obvious confusion.

***'YOU'RE DEAD!'***

## 4. Chapter 4

Johnathan was in a sour mood.

It was beginning to rain, and the passenger window of his LTD leaked, but he didn't care at the moment.

Thoughts of his little Brother, alone and terrified in that dark, rotting place constantly haunted him...followed closely by thoughts of Lonnie telling their Mom to forget about Will, like he was nothing more than yesterday's garbage.

The teenager gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white.

He had been there, briefly. He and Nancy had gone out looking for Will, not realizing just how dire the situation had been...

Flashbacks of rotted trees, giant, floating white spores, and an out of place Deer carcass flashed through his mind, and no amount of distracting music could drown them out.

Especially not the worst of them: the image of a clawed, humanoid monstrosity, gluttonously feasting on the corpse.

Above all, that horrifying moment when he had been trapped between worlds, one hand reaching out to the other side just before Nancy had helped pull him out remained stubbornly stuck in his mind, refusing to let go.

He sighed.

Hopefully, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler were open to him straight up asking if he could date their Daughter, at least...

Suddenly, a bike rider came out of nowhere, and Johnathan had to swerve to avoid hitting them: and a good thing he had too because Will would never have forgiven him for running his best friend over.

'Shit! Sorry, Mike!' he said, mentally kicking himself for not paying attention.

The younger boy nodded, a deer-in-the-headlights look still prevalent on his face.

'Hey is, uh- is Nancy home?'

'Y-yeah! I think so' he replied, quickly moving his bike over on the sidewalk.

'Cool, thanks, man'

After Mike had taken off, Johnathan sat there for a minute, envying his Brother for having the close friend that he had never had growing up, before pressing down on the accelerator once more, silently thanking God that Will was safe at home now.

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The boy who El knew was no longer Will Byers -at least, not entirely-seemed to be yelling at himself, as if in an argument with someone or something else unseen.

Though, of course, the Psychic had a pretty good, if rough idea of what it might be:

An entity from the upside down. An insidious energy-parasite - judging by the sheer amount of raw, psychic power that emanated from it- that undoubtedly had terrible plans for Hawkins.

Worse: it might even be a direct aspect of the master of that horrible place, and if that was indeed the case, she knew she had to somehow kill it, even if it meant the death of Mike's friend.

Even if Mike never forgave her: a thought that hurt deeply.

Aiming to take the monster by surprise, El suddenly blasted its host with a wave of psychic energy, throwing him across the road, and quickly moved to follow it.

As it stood, she was about to attack again but was caught by surprise as it spoke:

'Jane?! But **How?** HOW?!'

She began to walk purposefully forward again, brushing its words aside as nothing more than a distraction.

'YOU'RE DEAD!'

This time, she stopped cold. It hadn't framed that statement as a threat at all.

'I WATCHED YOU DIE!'

In fact, it acted as if it somehow *'knew'* her.

But no: it was just playing mind games.

Just like Papa had.

'ENOUGH!' she yelled, slamming it against a nearby tree. 'NO MORE TRICKS!'

Suddenly, the girl felt herself being lifted up into the air.

'STOP IT, JANE!' the entity commanded, his hand outstretched, but El responded with another knockback blast that sent it tumbling.

As she fell to the ground, a niggling thought in the back of her mind wondered just 'why' it kept calling her Jane...

No matter: she had more important things to focus on. Her power was already beginning to wane, and an unwelcomely familiar light-headedness was returning.

Wiping the blood from her nose, she resolved that she had to end this fight. 'Now'.

'I don't want to hurt you goddammit: Don't make me!'

A look of anger came over her face.

'Where is Will?!' she demanded.

She hadn't expended so much energy and effort to help Will Byers, just to see his mind devoured by a psychic parasite, but she 'would' kill him, were she left with no alternative.

'Will is fine!' it said, fists clenched. 'But stop hurting him!'

Now it was acting protective towards its host. But why?

Why was he so important to it?

And why was 'she'?

'Who are you?' she asked shakily in typical, blunt fashion, her speech having greatly improved under Jim's (and Mike's) tutelage.

A tear inexplicably materialized from his left eye, rolling down his cheek, and his look of anger was replaced with one of...

...hurt?

What the hell was going on?!

'I loved you' it said, closing its eyes, and breathing heavily. It seemed to be just as tired as she was.

El stood there in shock, unable to process what had just been said.

The entity slowly walked back towards Will's bike and stood it up.

'Just...don't follow us. Please' it said, taking off towards Town once again.

The bewildered psychic sat down in the middle of the road, exhausted, and caught in a mental whirlwind.

He didn't want to hurt her?

He loved her?

Her eye twitched.

He had watched her die?!

Suddenly, she jerked herself up onto her feet, teeth clenched, steam all but coming out of her ears.

She couldn't BELIEVE she had let that monster from the upside down

manipulate her emotions so easily! Especially with nonsense!

Marching back into the woods, she grabbed her stolen bicycle and began to peddle hard once she made it onto the road.

This entity was far, FAR more dangerous than she had realized. It had thrown her completely for a loop with devious mind games, and had even tricked her into 'letting' it escape.

What its end-goal was, she couldn't say. Who 'could' possibly understand the motives of its terrifying master?

But she knew one thing: she was going to stop it this time. She wasn't going to fall for its lies again.

## 5. Chapter 4: interlude

Jim's mind raced with a million and one thoughts as he drove his Blazer down one of the many country back-roads that virtually spider-webbed their way out of town.

He was a small town Police Chief who had inadvertently become involved with a Government cover-up of an extra-dimensional threat to the Hawkins -and probably to the surrounding area as well-.

Delved into said other dimension to rescue Joyce Byer's' son from being eaten by carnivorous monstrosities.

Come face to face with a towering, Lovecraftian nightmare that had intended his death.

Been rescued by Joyce's son in a terrifying, non-figurative flight.

And had ultimately ended up adopting a telekinetic young girl as his own daughter, tirelessly working to ensure that she was never discovered by the very Government agency that he was undoubtedly being monitored by.

The more he thought about it, the more absurd it all sounded to him.

He was living a sci-fi novel: A twisted, inconceivable science-fiction story that he couldn't simply put down and come back to later.

The Man laughed.

'Just my luck, moving to a backwoods podunk and ending up in the goddamn twilight zone'

A loud clap of thunder jolted him back into reality.

The sky had turned black with ominous-looking clouds that had crept up out of nowhere.

Jim grabbed his police scanner mic.

'Callahan? Powell? You there?'



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Nancy lay on her bed, trying to distract herself with a Nancy Drew novel.

But of course, every time she started to lose herself in the mystery, the terrifying events of the past three months came right back to the forefront of her thoughts.

Sleep had become elusive, and it probably hadn't been much better for Johnathan either, considering that his little Brother had been practically kidnapped right outside of his window.

Groaning in frustration, the girl threw the book at the dresser and buried her face in her pillow.

The front door opened downstairs, followed by the sound of voices, namely her Mom asking her own little Brother if he was alright.

Nancy sighed in relief: it had been thundering outside for the last ten minutes, and she had started to worry about Mike.

As much as he annoyed her, the thought of him getting hurt or kidnapped like his friend Will had worried her to no end and shared part of the blame for her insomnia.

The lights flickered, and the sound of TV commercials was suddenly interrupted by an all-too-familiar buzzer-like sound, followed by a local news anchor announcing a severe weather alert.

## 6. Chapter 5

Mike's glumness had been like a black cloud over his mind for weeks now: overshadowing and smothering his thoughts like a choking hand.

The fact that there was nothing he knew to do to help Will return to his old self almost seemed to have manifested into the literal storm outside his poster-filled room.

Sighing, he absent-mindedly began to fiddle with one of his D&D figures.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

'Coming!' said his Mother, as she hurried to the door.

'Who the hell would come over in 'this' weather?' queried his Dad from behind the Newspaper he was reading.

It had begun to pour outside, and the Weatherman had issued a severe weather warning only minutes ago.

'Oh, hello Johnathan. Can we help you?'

Will's older Brother: probably here to see Nancy.

Sometimes Mike wondered if it would have been better if 'he' had had a brother.

'Sorry to bother Mrs. Wheeler. Is uh...is Nancy here?'

Oh brother: of 'course' that was why he was here.

'So you're the young man my Daughter's been hiding from us' said Mr. Wheeler. 'Why don't you sit down and we'll talk, man to man?'

'Ugh!' groaned the young teen, rolling his eyes as he shut his door.

But even as he sat back down on his bed, his thoughts began to drift towards El, and his face turned red as he wondered what it would be

like to kiss her.

Suddenly, something hit his window with a loud 'ping'.

He hesitated for a second, and then another projectile bounced off the glass.

Rushing over to look out, the boy beamed when he saw who it was.

A confused look came over Mike's face when Will put his finger to his lips, but he nodded, and began making his way down to unlock the door to the basement.

---

El had been silent for a while now, and all attempts to speak with him had been met with a mental wall as impenetrable as the iron curtain.

Still, Will could sense that his other half was in torment, and the fragmented mental bleed-over suggested something terrible.

A...loss?

Something to do with this 'Jane' El had confused Mike's girlfriend with?

He growled in frustration. None of it made any sense!

'Will!' Mike exclaimed, breaking him out of his abnormal train of thought.

'Hey Mike!' he said, with a sigh of relief, stepping inside to embrace his best friend.

At least there was still a small fragment of his old life left.

'Are you okay, Will?' he said, concerned.

He nodded. 'Yeah, why?'

'Your nose is bleeding'

Will put his hand to his nostrils, and sure enough, his fingers came

away sticky with blood.

'Must've been when I fell' he said.

But then he remembered: he hadn't hit his nose at all during the scuffle with Eleven.

So why was his nose bleeding?

'Hold on' said Mike, ever the attentive friend. 'I'll get you a kleenex'

As the other boy made his way upstairs, Will began to notice something strange, that he had never felt before in his life:

His brain felt internally sore. Almost painfully so.

He shook his head, and began rubbing his temples.

Was he coming down with a cold?

In the distance, weather sirens began to wail.

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*'...reports of vanishing sewer-maintenance personnel have apparently alarmed Indianapolis City-officials, who still refuse to comment on the bizarre and seemingly growing water-poisoning incidents, which prompted an ongoing CDC investigation...'*

*'It's the damn goose-steppers! It 'has' to be! They're poisoning our fucking water!'*

*'Lonnie, please! Do you want our Daughter to talk like that?!'*

*The Man sighed. Terry was always getting onto him about his cursing.*

*'Sorry hon" he replied. 'It just pisses me off, knowing those jack-booted fu- uh, thugs get to do whatever they want to us with damn-near immunity, while our President slowly signs away our position of wartime strength like it's nothing-'*

*El sighed. He was sick to death of hearing about Nazis and the malevolent evil of the Third Reich. The war had been over for forty-two years, and he*

*had spent the last three assassinating its key party members with his mind.*

*The window above him opened, and Jane quickly motioned for him to climb in.*

*He nodded and in one, smooth psychic-powered motion, he deftly jumped through the window and straightened himself out midair.*

*'My dad just got in the shower, and my mom's watching TV' she said in a hushed tone, smiling at his showing off. 'So we have a little time'*

*She gave him a kiss on the cheek, and the young teen felt his face turn hot.*

*'Want some...help with your, uh...your homework?' he said, still struggling somewhat with complete sentences.*

*The girl shook her head and made her way over to her nightstand instead.*

*'Nah, I'm okay for now. But I have something for you, if you want it'*

*Opening her top droor, she pulled out a D&D figurine.*

*'This is Elminster: wise, powerful, and a protector of others'*

*She hesitated and blushed.*

*'Kind of like you'*

*Suddenly, the memory shattered into a million fragments, and the powerful entity quickly rushed out from his mental fortress, sensing that his twin was in danger.*

## 7. Chapter 6

Hopper's Blazer tore down the dirt road in a race against the storm.

Above the forested canopy, the sky was choked black with ominous-looking clouds, made even more foreboding by powerful wind-gusts.

He had to get back to the house. Now.

Jane was a survivor, that was undeniable. The girl had endured years of hell as a test-subject in a Government lab, and had survived just fine on her own following her escape. But Jim seriously doubted that even she could stop a tornado.

Maybe one day he would tell her the truth about her mother, and her real name.

Maybe.

But then, if he did, he would lose her for good.

Just like he had his own daughter.

'SHIT!' he exclaimed, just barely making it past as a big tree fell across the road.

His Grandfather's old home was within sight now, and Jim floored the accelerator, ruts and tree-roots be damned.

Slamming on the brakes, the big man jumped out and began running, not even bothering to take the keys out of the ignition.

Suddenly, the wind died, and an eerie stillness took its place.

'Kid! Where are you?!' he yelled, after opening the five or so locks he had installed on the front door.

No answer.

'Dammit, we don't have time to play, now where the hell are you!?'

He began hastily checking rooms before he finally went to hers, slamming the door open.

'Dammit kid, we gotta get to-'

Then he saw the open window, and his heart sank.

---

El grabbed a payday from her backpack and tore it open, devouring it in seconds.

The brief fight had drained her, but more importantly, it had drained the monster that had possessed Mikes friend as well.

At least, she hoped it had. The young psychic had no idea how her powers worked for creatures from the upside down, but the fact that it had recovered quickly enough to leave her in the dust didn't bode well.

Even still, she had clearly heard the 'real' Will's voice as he had fought back against his otherworldly enslaver.

The girl gritted her teeth and began peddling as fast as she could, knowing exactly where her target was heading.

Somehow, she was going to find a way to force that thing out of Will.

And then...

A bolt of lightning streaked across the sky.

...Then, she was going to kill it.

---

Dustin grabbed his snack-filled backpack, and- after throwing another can of Pringles and a few more bags of Cheetos in -hastily zipped it up.

'Dustin?' Mrs. Henderson called, worry in her voice. 'Is that the weather siren? What's going on?'

'Tornado, Mom!' he called, grabbing his prized Luke Skywalker action

figure and throwing it into his bag as he headed into the living room.

'Oh Jesus!' she exclaimed, pushing herself up off her recliner and onto her feet. 'Grab Mews, will you sweetie?'

Rolling his eyes, the portly young teen dropped his backpack and began frantically searching for the Family Cat.

'Mews! Come here, Mews!'

After what felt like an eternity, he finally found the old flea-bag hiding under his Mom's bed, and proceeded to pull him out, grimacing at the bloody lines the cat's claws were raking along his bare arms.

'Dustin? Where are you?!' his Mother called, fear evident in her voice.

'Coming Mom!' he called, tucking the capricious feline underneath his arm, and running back down the hall.

The unmistakably loud \*thud!\* of something hitting the roof caused both Mother and Son to flinch, and they knew they were almost out of time.

'Come on!' he said, opening the front door. 'We have to get to the cellar!'

The dark sky boomed with thunder, and a flock of terrified birds flew speedily overhead, in the opposite direction of the storm.

'Did you get the key to the lock?'

'Yeah Mom!' he said, reaching into his left pocket with his (relatively) free hand.

The two had made it a little over half-way to the storm cellar when he saw it.

Like a mountain of roiling obsidian, the massive wall cloud began to descend, and the weather sirens began to wail once again.

'Dustin, honey? What is that!?'



Confused, the normally jolly teen looked up to where his Mother was pointing a shaking finger, and inadvertently dropped his backpack, staring in open-mouthed shock.

Mrs. Henderson screamed.

A sea of writhing, semi-translucent black tentacles the size of skyscrapers were weaving their way in and out of the destructive cloud, as if the otherwise natural phenomenon had taken on a horrifying life of its own.

## 8. Chapter 7

'Doctor Klein!'

The balding, late-middle-aged Man looked up from his veritable mountain of paperwork, eyes flashing in annoyance.

'I trust this interruption is worth my time, Doctor Calthorpe?'

The other, slightly younger Man nodded, working to get his breath back before he spoke again, having apparently run for some distance.

'Well?!'

The lights flickered, followed by the distant rumble of thunder.

'We've picked up some highly unusual energy readings, sir!'

Klein picked up his glasses, and carefully put them on.

'And how 'exactly' does this concern me?'

Doctor Calthorpe hastily presented his superior with a long, rolled data sheet.

'We believe they're related to the anomaly'

After a few seconds of intensive study, the older Man's face adopted a look of incredulity.

'This can't be right. Check your instrumen-'

Suddenly, another Scientist knocked rapidly on the door, and quickly entered without invitation.

'Doctor Klein?' said the newcomer, scratching his blond head nervously. 'We've umm-' he swallowed '-We've observed a number of panicked local calls, all claiming to have seen something unusual in the sky'

Doctor Sanders was the most junior member of Klein's research

department. Having only arrived a few weeks ago, the young Man had proven to be of exceptional talent in the field of particle physics, which was currently the primary focus of the facility for one, critical reason.

The gateway.

The putrid, organic monstrosity had been pushing incessantly downwards for over a month, infecting the very ground beneath them in ways that few at the facility wished to imagine.

They 'had' to get that drilling equipment here, fast.

He sighed, and began chewing on his lower lip. A nervous habit that had translated into moments of deep thought over the decades.

There had to be an intelligence behind all this. He felt it in his gut.

But what sort of obscenely powerful entity could affect weather patterns from an entirely separate dimension?

The potential answers made him shudder internally.

'Anything else, Junior-researcher?'

The newest member of the (publicly) unknown research department had to bite his 'own' lip before responding.

'We've also intercepted a domestic disturbance call that might possibly be related to the late Doctor Brenner's 'special project''

Klein practically jumped up out of his computer chair, his mind racing with questions.

Subject #011 was a just a girl, but she was anything but foolish. There was no possible way she would risk being recaptured if she could help it.

So why would she so openly utilize her psychic abilities now?

'Tell me you have an address'

The other Man nodded, and handed him a post-it note with a street address and home number hastily scrawled on it.

'One more thing, Doctor: there umm, there seems to be another person of interest involved as well. A 'William Byers'

He stopped cold.

What possible connection could the Byers Boy have to any of this, aside from the time he had spent in the parallel world?

Had the girl turned violent?

What possible reason would she have to attack an unarmed civilian, unless...?

Then it hit him like a ton of bricks.

Unless he had brought something back with him. Something that Eleven felt was a threat.

And judging by the makeup of that vile, rotting dimension, it could only be something that was parasitic in nature.

Possibly something that could pose a threat to the public at large.

'Calthorpe! Assemble a recovery team! Inform them that they are to capture 'both' Children 'alive', if possible! The Boy takes priority!'

'Sanders! Have your team monitor the atmospheric anomaly for as long as they can! We need to gather as much data as possible on it!'

The two Men quickly rushed out into the hall, and Klein grabbed the phone from the wall-receiver.

'This is Doctor Klein: I need to speak with Director of operations Owens, 'immediately!'

---

Joyce huddled in the convenience store's filthy Bathroom, praying desperately for the safety of her Sons while shakily putting a cigarette in her mouth.

Ever since the traumatic incident a month and a half ago, the hard-working, lower-middle-class Mother of two had turned back to smoking like never before: one a day had quickly escalated to three, then four.

Even still, the nicotine couldn't erase the nightmare of having almost lost her youngest Son.

Neither could it eliminate the terrifying memory of being psychically hurtled through the poisoned air of another world.

And it certainly couldn't eliminate the nerve-racking realization that there was someone- something -else inhabiting his mind besides him.

Something that seemed to mirror her Will, her precious boy, but darkly: an angry, cynical reflection of someone that she never wanted to see her last-born become.

After digging furiously through her purse, she finally found her lighter and struck it, collapsing back against the wall.

It was all too much for one person to handle. Especially a single Mom working overtime to pay the bills.

Luckily, there was no one else around at the moment. The fat, balding cashier had probably taken off for the safety of a sturdier structure, and it occurred to her that hiding from a tornado in a gas station probably wasn't very wise.

Per Hopper's request, she hadn't told Johnathan a thing about Will, but she had seen the suspicion on his face. He knew something was wrong, that his younger brother wasn't himself, and Joyce feared that if he started digging, he would inadvertently put himself in danger, and not just from the Government.

Based on what Will had confided in her, the entity, which identified itself as 'El', considered itself to be his protector, and would do whatever it needed to ensure his safety no matter who or what was in the way.

'Oh God' said the beleaguered Woman, dropping the lighter and putting her head in her hands as the reality of her family's situation

threatened to overwhelm her.

'I can't do this! I can't do th-!' tears streamed down her face and convulsive, racking sobs consumed her.

## 9. Chapter 7: interlude

An ear-splitting clap of thunder caused El to jump.

For some odd reason, her mind had been in a state of dis-ease ever since the storm had rolled in, and she couldn't shake the feeling that there was something very, very wrong in the atmosphere.

Peeking around the corner to the Wheeler's basement-door, her eyes narrowed, and a look of intense determination came over her face.

She didn't know exactly what the unnatural disturbance was, but she had a pretty good idea of where it was coming from.

After taking a deep breath and letting it out, the young telekinetic began walking towards the door, fists clenched.

She was about to do something that could very well destroy the long-time friendship between Mike and Will, and would more than likely end...whatever it was between her and Mike.

The thought of that almost made her turn around and leave, right then and there.

But then again, if she did nothing, who knew what kind of damage the monster inside of Will would cause?

She had seen first-hand just how ferocious and vile any and all things from the upside down were.

How much more had Will seen in his time there, before his mind had been taken over?

The girl mentally steeled herself, performing the breathing exercises that she had been taught to calm her mind.

Dispelling the last, niggling little thought of doubt from her mind, she reached for the door handle.

If she wasn't able to stop this creature, then at least her old, hated jailers at the DARPA research facility 'could', once they got wind of

what was happening.

She just had to distract him long enough to keep him from getting away.

She sighed and closed her eyes.

Even if it meant being recaptured.

---

Time stood still.

All was as an ocean of deadness.

Unmoving.

Frozen in place.

Such were the effects of reaching through the vastness of time and space: weaving deftly between undesirable temporal flows, and the detritus of severed timelines.

All for the sake of arranging the (soon-to-be) inevitable arrival of her and her children at the desired point in 'real-time', so to speak:

The taking of the mirror-earth. The lone-surviving reflection of what this world and countless others before it had been.

There, she would finally have access to a dimensional crossroads, from which she could spread her children outwards like the black, writhing psychic nodes that spread across so many worlds already.

So many.

But not enough.

Never enough.

All of the cosmos, all worlds, all dimensions would be hers.

She would be the master of all things.

All worlds.



All galaxies.

All would bow to her and die, so that her children would feed, and that her reality would grow to engulf the very fabric of existence.

And there it was at last: the weak-point.

The tiny, hairline crack in the barrier between her dimension and theirs.

Like the insidious parasite that she was, the Mother pushed a tiny fragment of her consciousness -her essence- into the fissure, slowly and methodically pushing it towards the other side, lest the breach attempt to re-seal itself, and expel her presence.

This was a colossally roundabout way of manipulating another world's atmosphere over a very specific area, but she had no choice as the gate simply had not yet been strengthened enough to allow for more direct action though it.

This of course was due entirely to the necessity of her children's presence there remaining hidden until the time was right, slowly gathering more and more of the blood-bags (or 'Humans', as the prey called themselves) to feed to it until it had grown impervious to all but the most destructive force.

That hated, primal element that filled even her monstrous heart with hateful loathing.

That thing the blood-bags of this world had called 'fire'.

## 10. Chapter 8

'So you're an aspiring photographer, is that it?'

Johnathan swallowed under Ted Wheeler's witheringly scrutinizing stare.

'Umm, yes sir. I've sent in a few pictures in to National geo-'

'And how much do you think a photographer makes in a year on average?'

The sixteen-year-old shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

'Uh...I'm sorry sir?'

Ted's face took on an annoyed look.

'It's not that hard of a question, son. I'm a numbers Man, and a numbers Man needs sufficient data for risk-assessment'

Luckily, their Son chose that moment to run back down-stairs, mercifully distracting his Father from the interrogation.

'No running in the house, Mike!'

'Sorry Dad!' replied the Wheeler boy, as he started down the second set of stairs to the basement.

'Hold on, Mike: what's that in your hand?'

'Just some tissues!'

He continued down to the basement.

'Okay...' said Ted suspiciously, though Johnathan suspected that he was someone who was always suspicious.

'Now, back to my question-'

Suddenly, the weather sirens began to go off, one by one.

'Oh, for cryin' out loud- KAREN!'

Mrs. Wheeler quickly made her way into the living room, followed by Nancy, who had been helping her in the Kitchen.

'Ted? What's going on?'

The sky erupted into a powerful rumble that shook the walls of the house.

'We might need to go down to the basement if it gets bad enough out there' he said, getting up from the couch. 'Do we have everything we need in case the power goes out?'

---

Mike rushed down the stairs with the box of kleenexes, both excited that his best friend had come over, and worried for him at the same time, as his torn shirt and dirt-smeared jacket suggested that he had been running from something.

Or someone.

'Probably Troy and James again' he thought, clenching his fists in anger.

They likely hadn't learned their lesson at all, even after El had scared them both half to death with her psychic powers at the quarry.

He hated them, and he hated how weak and pathetic he was around them.

'Especially' when they were hurting his friends.

'Hey Will!' he said, as he opened the door. 'You wanna-'

He stopped, staring in shock at what was happening before his very eyes.

El was telekinetically pinning his friend against the far-wall just opposite of the game-board table. Her face a mask of steel.

'Monster!' she yelled, angrily.

Will shook his head desperately.

'You don't understand!' he replied in a panicked voice. 'He's not what you-'

'El! What are you doing?!' shouted Mike, perturbed at the sight of his best friend in peril.

She grimaced in frustration, struggling to string the right words together into a correct sentence.

'That's...Not...Will!'

The boy blinked in confusion.

'What the hell are you talking about?! Of 'course' that's Will! Now let him go!'

She shook her head, and continued to hold his best friend in place.

'Why won't you listen to me-?!'

'ENOUGH!'

Mike stared in horror as the girl he loved was suddenly thrown back against the wall behind her, and pinned herself.

But when he turned to look at Will, the tissue box drop from his hand.

His friend since childhood, who he had shared all of his toys with, and who had selflessly done the same for him, was gone.

His countenance had changed in its entirety, and now mirrored someone that Will was not: a dark and deadly-serious individual.

His normal, nervous quirks and habits that he had seen him exhibit in countless stressful situations were nowhere to be seen.

Even his very movements had changed, bearing no resemblance to those of an awkward preteen boy, but rather someone who was unquestionably confident in their ability to harm others.

A killer.

Mike shrank back under the alien's intimidating gaze, unable to utter a single word.

'I take it you're Will's 'friend', right? He's told me about you.'

An ear-splitting crack of thunder shook the house again, and El used the momentary distraction to blindside her opponent with a telekinetic shove that knocked him off his feet and sent him rolling.

'Don't...listen!' the girl said to a bewildered Mike.

Not-Will quickly recovered, launching himself into the air from his back and onto his feet with the grace of an experienced martial artist that the 'real' Will was not.

Who 'was' this person?!

And more importantly: what had he done with his best friend?

'I tried to warn him, you know!' the other said in a supremely frustrated tone. 'I told him what would happen if he didn't stay away from his friends!'

Then he rounded on El, eyes filled with equal parts anger and hurt as if he somehow knew her, which only served to deepen Mike's confusion.

'And 'you'! Do you know what you've done?! This is the 'second' time you've put everyone in danger, you FUCKING IDIOT! Don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about!'

'SHUT UP!' shouted El, picking up a chair from behind her adversary and throwing it at him, only to watch it smash down to the floor and splinter into pieces.

Now, however, there were tears in her eyes.

'WILL YOU BOTH JUST STOP?!' Yelled Mike frantically, his exasperated voice cracking from the stress.

A blinding bolt of lightning struck nearby, followed by another loud crack of thunder, as if to denote emphasis on the volatility of the situation at hand.

No one moved.

No one even dared to breathe.

The tension in the room was so thick, it was almost tangible.

Then, finally, Mike spoke again with clenched fists and confusion-induced anger.

'WHO 'ARE' YOU?! And Where.

Is.

**WILL?!'**

Defiantly, the boy stared into the eyes of the stranger who wore his friend's face, shoulders heaving as if he had just tried out for the track team.

To his left, by the back-door, El looked at her crush with a surprised and uncertain look, having never expected the normally timid 13-year-old to exhibit anything akin to strength of personality.

The other, however, had adopted an entirely different expression altogether, cocking his head and squinting slightly, as if trying to decipher something enigmatic in Mike's face.

'You really care for him, don't you?'

He nodded without hesitation.

'I don't understand. Why?'

Mike put unclenched his fists, and took a deep breath.

'Because that's what friends do: They stand up for each o-'

*'What the hell is going on down there?!'*

Before anyone could react, the door to the main house flew open and in stormed Ted Wheeler, dispassionate businessman having given way to unhappy Father.

'I want to know what's going on right this in-!'

One look at the devastation plus two strangers in his house caused the Man to do a double-take.

'D-Dad?'

Ted's eye twitched, followed by a tensing of his lower jaw.

---

Johnathan felt like he had been punched in the gut.

It was obvious that Nancy's Dad had already dismissed him as unworthy before he had even gotten to know him.

Still, he 'had' asked him to help Mrs. Wheeler move some things down to the basement, so that was something at least.

He hoped.

'Don't let my Husband get to you, sweetie' said Karen, as he picked up an oversized beanbag. 'He's as critical of himself as he is to other people'

Suddenly, there was a crash downstairs, and Ted came out of the corner-closet to investigate.

'Mike, you had better 'not' have broken anything'

Karen sighed.

'Johnathan!'

Nancy came down the stairs smiling, an old-looking teddy bear poking its head out of the box that she was carrying.

He gave a goofy, lop-sided smile back.

Suddenly, yelling could be heard from the basement, and the sound

of someone hitting the door with the palm of their hand could be heard.

'Oh Jesus, Ted' Said Mrs. Wheeler, hastily putting her own, food-filled box down, and heading for the stairs as well, leaving the two teenagers alone.

A moment of awkward silence passed before Nancy spoke up.

'Hey, umm, good to see you' she said, silently berating herself for sounding like an idiot.

'Yeah, how are you?' he replied, cringing at his own idiocy, as he set the beanbag down.

She shrugged.

'Okay, I guess. Is your Brother doing alright after...?'

She obviously didn't want to bring up the whole 'upside-down' incident at all, and Johnathan agreed wholeheartedly.

'He's doing okay, I think. I just...'

She put her box down, and sat on the lower steps of the stairs.

'You're worried about him'

He nodded.

'It's just he hasn't been himself since Mom and Hopper got him back. I don't know how to explain it, but sometimes I don't even think it's 'him!'

Nancy got up and walked over to Johnathan, putting a hand on his shoulder.

'He was in hell for three weeks. It's amazing he got back alive at all'

Suddenly, the sound of a distinctive, high-pitched voice that he recognized emanated from the basement.

'Will? What is he 'doing' he-?!'



A Woman's scream pierced the air, followed by a heavy thud that could only be a human body being thrown against something.

'Mom?!'

The two ran to the stairs, only to see Karen running back up, terror on her face.

'Call the police!'

---

'This is Alpha team-lead reporting. ETA at target-location is less than fifteen minutes, over'

Ever since the Gate had opened and people had begun to disappear, the publicly unknown DOE response teams had steadily upped the ante in terms of how they responded to crises and had subsequently adopted an increasingly militaristic approach to the growing problems at hand.

Recently, the eggheads at DARPA had shared some advanced new pieces of hardware, and the boys were eager to test them out.

Still, the bigger issue of the Gate remained frustratingly untouched, and sometimes the Man fantasized about cracking those scientists heads together every time they condescendingly cited the need for 'more research'.

How much time did they have before that damn thing grew or something?

'Uhhh...Sir? I think you need to see this...'

The remnants of the wall cloud were now inexplicably hovering over the facility, endlessly churning, but locked in an unnatural holding pattern, and seemingly refusing to dissipate.

'Jesus...' said the team-lead.

They had to get those kids and find out what they knew, fast.

## 11. Chapter 9

'Lucas, where are you?!'

'LUCAS!'

The walkie-talkie crackled with Dustin's panicked voice, and the third member of the trio ran and grabbed it before his infuriating little Sister could.

'What?' he said in his usual, aggressively annoyed tone.

'DID YOU SEE THE SKY?!'

The boy rolled his eyes.

'Umm no, I was too busy trying not to get sucked up by a freaking tornado!'

For some, inexplicable reason, the normal static had become replaced with a bizarre, and unceasing series of chittering clicks.

'There was something in the wall cloud! It- tentacles and-'

He was breaking up, which made no sense, as the three friends lived well within the signal range of the devices, and the storm was already gone.

'Son of a bitch!' he exclaimed, trying in vain to dial in the signal.

Suddenly, an unnatural, piercing screech caused him to drop the heavy, plastic object and cover his ears.

'What the shit?!' he exclaimed, as the weird chittering resumed.

Then, for a brief moment, Dustin came back.

'-Can't -hold of Mike! Can y-'

Angrily, he snatched it back up off the floor.

'There's some weird-ass interference going on! Try again in a little

bit!'

Just as he switched channels and was about to try Mike, however, something inexplicable happened.

The near-indecipherable sound of Two Men talking suddenly began to bleed over into the normal signal: exceedingly difficult to piece together due to the interference, but not impossible.

Curious, Lucas listened in, certain his friend was fine.

'is priority. -must be captured at all- girl is secondary. Witnesses are-'

'Cops?' the boy said to no one in particular, as he struggled to make out what was being said amidst the erratic signal.

'-gain, suspect is- early teens. extreme caution when appoa-

'Roger. Approaching residence n- apprehend Byers and-'

Lucas nearly dropped the device again.

It was the DOE.

He thought Hopper had squared everything with them and Will! Why were they coming after him now?!

Forgetting Mike for the time-being, the boy dialed in the signal to Will's Walkie-talkie, knowing that he probably wouldn't answer, but he had to try anyway.

'Will, are you there?! Will come in, over!'

'ANSWER THE DAMN RADIO!'

---

Joyce cautiously peered out of the bathroom door, and breathed a shaky, momentary sigh of relief, thanking God for sunshine.

Making her way to her car, she took a moment to throw the cigarette she was smoking to the ground and flatten it with her shoe.

As she climbed in the driver's seat and inserted the key into the

ignition, the exhausted Mother took a deep breath, steeling herself for what she was about to do.

The Pinto fired up, and began chugging out of the convenience store parking lot.

For the sake of her Children, it was time for Joyce Byers to stop running from her problems, and face them head-on.

It was time to confront this 'El', and get some answers out of it.

---

Steve eyed the neverending storm-cloud with trepidation, wondering, like so many others by now, just what the hell was going on?

Wondering...and afraid.

Afraid that he might know, or at least have some inkling as to what was behind it.

His Parents had taken a vacation to the Bahamas, leaving him in charge of the house again, and until the storm had arrived he had planned on throwing another party with the few people left in Hawkins who didn't think he'd lost his coolness.

But not now. Something was up, and he knew damn well that it had 'something' to do with those disgusting-ass portals that were opening up and closing all over town.

Grabbing the phone, he began dialing Nancy's number, hoping that by some off-chance she would pick up, and not her boring, prick Dad.

---

Hopper's Blazer bounced and bucked as he drove straight through the woods.

The storm had passed some time ago, but there were still some distant rumblings.

He had a pretty good idea of Jane was going, and when he found her, he was going to all but spank the living hell out of her for endangering not only herself but that boy Mike and his family as

well.

Did it not even enter her mind that her actions had consequences?! This he mused, as he skillfully dodged trees.

*'I presume this is Jim Hopper? I would advise that you pick up-'*

Jim gritted his teeth and grabbed the radio mic, not even having to guess at who might have pirated into a police frequency.

'What do you want?'

A brief pause.

*'There is a rather...'delicate' situation that we are currently working to contain, and your assistance is required in the matter'*

'Can you people never just come out and say what the hell it is you want?'

Another pause.

*'You've been requested at the facility for debriefing. I am not at liberty to discuss the details, but it involves our current, eh... 'problem in the basement', as it were'*

Shit. If the gate was acting up, the DOE pricks would probably want him to redirect, deflect, and otherwise misdirect any and all questions that pertained to it.

'Fine. I'll be there in about twenty minutes'

He finally made it out to the dirt back-road that went behind the Wheeler residence when he saw them.

Three out of place 'Hawkins Power and light' vans, parked right behind the very house he had been headed for, and a swarm of at least twenty men dressed in black paramilitary uniforms and face-concealing masks were about to break down the door to the basement.

'Oh 'Jesus'...!'

They didn't even care if they were seen anymore.

## 12. Chapter 10

'El, stop!' shouted Will from within his own mind, powerless to do anything.

'El!'

But it was no use. His other half had trapped him.

Frustrated, he began 'kicking' at the non-corporeal walls of his subconscious, sick and tired of being treated like the weak and helpless mommas boy that he had once been.

'LET ME OUT, ASSHOLE! LET-'

Kick.

'-ME'

Kick.

'OUT!'

Somewhere, in a deep, dark part of the psyche that human beings have yet to explore, Will felt a massive pressure begin to build up, like a soda can being shaken.

Until a formless 'thing' that he couldn't explain or define shattered its own prison walls, expanding outwards like an unstoppable ocean-tide.

Doubling over in pain, the adolescent tried desperately to alleviate it, but to no avail.

'AHHH!-'

It felt like he was being torn apart at the molecular level: as if his entire body were being filled to the brim with a powerful, chaotic energy whose alien presence terrified the boy, even as it ripped and tore at him from within.

Then it reached unbearable levels and he screamed, shattering the walls of his cell with a psychic-explosion of volcanic-level magnitudes.

He didn't even realize that El was there holding him until it was over, trying desperately to contain the violently destructive manifestation of Will's latent-psychic powers.

---

'Michael Wheeler' said Ted, causing his son to swallow in fear. He only ever used his full name when he was angry at him.

'You have three seconds to tell me why one of my chairs is broken, and why you invited two friends over without my permission!'

'One!'

Mike looked over at not-Will, who seemed distracted at the moment.

'Dad, i-i-'

'Two!'

El was sitting on the ground with her head on her knees, visibly exhausted.

'Three-'

'Will you 'please' shut the hell up?!'

Mike stared aghast as his Father was thrown back against the door, grunting in pain as his head clipped the knob, causing his Mother to run back up the stairs, screaming.

Finally, something in him snapped, and before he could even think about the danger of what he was doing, he found himself running full-boar at the unimpressed monster, tackling him to the ground.

'GET OUT OF MY FRIEND, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!' he cried frantically, awkwardly driving an incorrectly balled fist into Will's face, hating that he was hurting his friend, while simultaneously understanding that this wasn't 'him'.



'Ha' the other smirked, infuriating Mike even moreso. 'Not bad: but you'd be dead in a real fight'

Suddenly, he connected his own fist with Mike's side, causing him to yelp with pain, and El casually pushed him off, not wanting to hurt him 'too' much.

'You want your 'friend' back?' he said, popping his knuckles. 'You're gonna have to fight me for him'

His twisted smile was cocky, but it was obvious that he was tired, as evidenced by his heavy breathing.

The adolescent gritted his teeth and clenched his fists.

'Who are you?! And what do you care about Will?! You're just a fucking parasite!'

El grabbed him by the shirt, and swept his legs out from under him, throwing him to the floor and pinning him.

'What do 'i' care?! What do YOU care?! He's just there for you to laugh and feel good with! YOU'RE the fucking parasite!'

Mike surprised him with a headbutt that caused them both reel, and clutch their heads in pain.

'You don't know shit!' he yelled through his tears. 'You didn't grow up with him! You weren't there for him when his piece of shit dad used to hit him and call him a pussy!'

El took a ragged breath, taking a shaky hand away from his forehead to look at the blood, wincing.

'You would NEVER understand, you idiot! You fucking mouth-breather! I'm NOT just one of those mindless, clawed 'freaks' under her control! I'm- I'm...'

Suddenly, he collapsed to the ground, clutching the sides of Will's head and biting his lower lip hard enough to draw blood, his entire body convulsing as if he were being electrocuted.

'R-RUN!' he cried, and Mike began to back away as his hair began to stand on end, feeling tiny pinpricks of energy pop against his skin that became more violent and painful by the second.

The lights flickered erratically, and just as he reached the other side of the room to shield the other, completely spent psychic, the entire world exploded around them.

---

'Team on-site now. Awaiting orders'

'Very good' replied Director Owens. 'Commence the operation, and be sure to have at 'least' two of your men record the results'

'Roger. Alpha team-lead out'

The man signaled for a breaching formation, and his soldiers snapped into action, taking position on both sides of the door while two others brought up a battering ram, ready to break the back door of the residence open.

He held up the fingers and began silently displaying the countdown.

3

2

1

Suddenly, an explosion the likes of which none of them had ever seen engulfed them.

'GET DOWN! GE-!

Windows shattered, bricks fell off the sides and back of the house, and the door followed suit, splintering into large pieces that impaled the two doormen through their kevlar vests, causing them to drop their breaching weapon and collapse to the ground, screaming in agony.

Glass exploded outwards, and a sizeable piece embedded itself in the throat of the man nearest the Team-lead on his side of the door.

When the dust had settled, five of his men were dead or dying, and eleven or so were seriously injured, enraging him.

'MOVE IN! GO! GO! GO!'

Making sure to be the first one in, he kicked the remnants of the door out of the way, and proceeded into the basement, more than eager to use the experimental shock-rifle he and his team had been outfitted with now.

---

'JESUS CHRIST!' Jim exclaimed when he saw the explosion.

He had been ready to do something incredibly stupid when he saw the DOE's thugs ready to storm an innocent family's house, but the sight of that bizarre energy burst had changed his perspective on the matter.

Had Jane done that?!

Fuck.

He now knew that there was no choice for him in the matter but to play along with the Feds 100%. It was too late to help the girl escape, and after that display, he regretfully began to wonder if maybe, just maybe, she was too dangerous to be free.

Then he saw them begin to drag people out in handcuffs, and his anger flared.

Especially when he saw Jane and Mike being shoved forward like cattle.

He climbed back into his blazer and revved the engine, putting the pedal to the metal.

There was no way in hell he was going to stand for this shit, not even if Reagan himself ordered him to.

## 13. Chapter 11

'-When God gives us power he expects us to be responsible with it, people. When we abuse it, we're asking to lose it-'

Joyce turned the radio off, sighing. She had been looking for encouragement, not a lecture.

A distant rumble caused her to glance over towards the direction of the power plant, and the sight of the swirling, undying storm hovering over it caused her to gasp.

'Oh my God...'

What on earth was going on?

She had to get back home to Will.

Fifteen minutes later, she pulled her Pinto up to the house, and took a deep breath before climbing out.

'Please help me' she prayed as she walked up to the door.

Joyce wasn't even all that religious, but she figured that, at this point, she could use all the help she could get.

'Will?' she said, as she walked in. 'I'm home!'

No answer.

'Will!'

Rounding the corner, she ran to his bedroom, only to find his made up bed and the strangely corroded D&D figurine on his nightstand.

Immediately, the thought occurred to her that he had been taken again, and fear began to well up inside her.

'Joyce: calm down' she told herself, resolving to not lose it until after she had made a call to the Wheeler's to see if he was there, though memories of the last time around still gnawed at her.

Quickly grabbing the new(est) phone, she began dialing, tapping her nail nervously against the heavy plastic handle as it rang.

And rang.

And rang.

Frustrated, she hung up and tried again, only to have the same results.

'Please pick up, Karen. Please pick up...'

Still nothing.

'PICK IT UP YOU BITCH!' she snapped, but to no avail.

She slammed the receiver down and collapsed against the wall, crying again, a feeling of helplessness threatening to overwhelm her.

Suddenly, the phone rang, and the beleaguered Woman snatched it up as fast as she could.

'H-hello?!' she said, hoping that it was one of the Wheelers.

'Joyce?' said a familiar voice, but it wasn't Karen or Ted.

It was Hopper.

'Oh, thank god! Could I ask you a favor, Jim? I need you to check and see if Will's over at the Wh-'

'Joyce' he interrupted, a grim note in his voice that caused her to momentarily lose her own. 'I need you to come down to the facility'

Finally, she found her words again, swallowing hard before she responded.

'Where-where is Will? Is he-'

'Yeah, he's here, but Joyce-'

She breathed a sigh of relief that he hadn't been pulled back into that horrible, rotting place again.

'-Johnathan is here too'

'What? What do you mean?! What do they want with him?! He doesn't have anything to do with 'any' of this!'

'Joyce, listen to me!'

She had never been so close to a nervous breakdown before in her life, but now, the panic threatened to overwhelm her.

'Oh God, oh god, oh god...'

'JOYCE!'

Her breath was coming in rapid gasps, and she felt faint.

'If you give out now, your Sons won't have a Mother. Do you want that for them, Joyce?'

The attack died down to a quiet whisper as the reality of those words hit her. It was still there, but dialed down, having been forced into the back seat of her mind by the sobering thought of Will being taken away by CPS, and Johnathan being homeless.

'N-no! No!'

It was still a fight, but she had a new priority now, and hell itself couldn't keep her from her children.

Taking another deep, shaky breath.

'I'm on my way 'now'. But Jim-'

'Yeah?'

She gritted her teeth.

'Don't you let them touch a single. damn. hair on their heads'

---

'Dammit Nancy, pick up!'

Steve had been dialing and redialing the Wheelers for the last thirty

minutes without success.

Something was wrong.

Nancy's family never went on vacation. Her boring-ass parents barely even left the house!

'Shit!' he exclaimed, hanging up for what had to have been the hundredth time.

Maybe the storm had knocked out their power.

Grabbing the keys to his BMW, the rich kid headed for the garage.

Just as he was about to enter, however, a loud knock came from the front door.

'Who is it?' He called, annoyed.

When he looked out the peephole, he felt his heart leap into his throat.

It was the Feds!

With shaking hands, he opened the door, not even bothering to ask himself if they had found out about his involvement with the upside-down incident.

'Steve Harrington?' asked the stone-faced G-man who was flanked by two other agents with sticks up their asses as well.

'Can I help you, sir?'

The man reached into his coat and pulled out his wallet, showing him his ID.

'Agent Harold Darro, Central Intelligence Agency. We need you to come with us, Mr. Harrington'

What the fuck?! CIA?

'Uh- shit. Can I ask what this is about, Agent Darro?'

'It's a matter of national security, Mr. Harrington. Now please come with us. I'm not going to ask you again'

Steve gulped, running a hand nervously through his hair.

'Okay, fine' he said. 'But I want to call my mom and dad when we get to wherever the hell we're going'

The agent shook his head as his two minions took him by the arms and began leading him towards the waiting, solid-black Government vehicles.

'No phone calls, Mr. Harrington. The situation is too dire'

'What?! No! My Dad wants me to call him at least once a week! Let me go! let me go, you fucking assholes!'

Rolling his eyes, the man ordered his two agents to hold him still while he produced a syringe from a sealed metal case in his coat pocket.

'If you're not going to cooperate, Mr. Harrington, then I'm afraid I'll have no choice but to sedate you'

'FUCK YOU!' he yelled, thrashing in vain against the iron-like grip of the agents, only to feel a sharp pain in the side of his neck.

'Put him in' he ordered.

As his body went limp and his vision faded, Steve felt his last few thoughts drift towards Nancy Wheeler.

---

Will awoke to find himself lying in a hospital bed once again, IV tubes dripping essential, restorative minerals into his bloodstream, the familiar, rhythmic beeping of the ECG monitor sounding off beside him.

He felt drained and exhausted as if he had run a marathon, and his head, while no longer pounding, felt like a buzzing beehive.

Then he remembered the explosion.



The sound of shattering glass.

And El's fight with Jane and Mike beforehand.

His eyes narrowed, and he clenched his fists and gritted his teeth, wincing at the pain in his eye where Mike had hit him.

Now he was pissed.

Not over Jane, of course, as she had attacked 'them'. Plus, she was by all accounts a tough survivor who could take some serious punishment, though Will was still supremely curious about the elusive connection between her and the girl El had known back in the pre-upside down.

No, his twin had committed the ultimate sin by attacking his only true friend in the world, and he wasn't going to just 'let it go' this time like he had so many times before.

**'EL!' he angrily yelled into the other side of their split psyche, the boundaries of which they had (mostly) both respected, save for that one time Will had stupidly forced himself into El's memories, and had nearly destroyed himself as a result.**

At times, when he had laid awake at night (which had lasted for more than a few nights after being brought back from the upside down), he wondered just how he had been able to do that at all.

At first, he had thought that El had simply allowed him to, to avoid hurting him, but that didn't make any sense as he had already more or less known what would happen when he succeeded.

Had that been an early manifestation of...whatever this power was within him?

***'EL! I'm talking to y-'***

Suddenly, his inner-self ran headlong into a syrupy barrier of pure, impenetrable confusion.

***'What 'is' this shit?!'***

Try as he might, all attempts he made to breach it resulted in an inexplicable and illogical panic forcing him back.

Nevertheless, he could sense, faintly, that his other-half was trying the same thing, and having as much success as he was.

What had they done to him?

The door to the hospital room opened, and in walked a familiar face, carrying a clipboard.

Doctor Owens: the fake Psychologist who actually headed the DOE facility.

In the months following his time in the upside down, Will had been required to attend numerous 'therapy sessions' per Chief Hopper's request (and by 'request', he had meant 'do what the Feds say, or you'll end up as a test-subject In one of their labs'), and El had remotely listened in on the good Doctor's conversations with his colleagues via the installation's PA system.

'I imagine you're feeling a little disoriented right now, Will' he said, pulling up a chair from the far wall and sitting down at the side of the bed. 'The effects of the neural-disruptors should wear off in a few hours, but before that happens, there are some things that need to be cleared up. Things that concern National Security'

The boy nodded, opting to play along until he could reconnect with El.

'Where's my Mom?' He demanded. 'And where's Mike?'

The Man calmly uncapped his pen, and set the clipboard in his lap.

'They're fine. But I'm afraid you're in serious trouble, young man'

He nodded again, feeling guilty over what he had accidentally done to Mike's house.

'I'm sorry, i-i didn't mean to blow up the Wheeler's house-'

Owens shook his head.

'I don't think you understand, Son' he said, producing several pictures of maimed and dead soldiers. The same ones that had stormed the basement.

'Four Federal agents are dead, Will, and six are maimed for life. Now I need to know-' he said, not even giving Will time to take in the enormous weight of what he had just told him.

'How did you do it?'

His breath was coming in shorter and faster, and the ECG began to increase in pace.

Emotionally, it felt like he was being crushed with a giant anvil, and there was nothing that El, or Johnathan, or his Mother could do to save him now.

He was a murderer.

'Will' Said the Doctor again, but in a much more serious voice. 'I need you to answer me'

How could he possibly explain?

And worse: staying silent would probably make it worse. Not just for him, but for Mike as well, though deep down, he knew that their friendship was over.

As dead as the Men whose lives he had ended.

## 14. Chapter 12

Johnathan was beside himself.

He had been sitting, right wrist handcuffed to his bolted-down chair, for hours now without even so much as a 'screw you' from the G-fucks, save for the one asshole in the lab coat who had walked in, set a clipboard and a cup of coffee down on the heavy-metal table, and walked silently back out.

And that had been at least twenty five or so minutes ago.

The thought of how they had treated the Wheelers- especially Nancy - in their own home, slapping them all in handcuffs and throwing everyone blindfolded into their fake 'utility vans' without even reading them their rights made the sixteen year old angry beyond words.

But what they had done to Will made his blood boil. They had shot him in the head at near point-blank range, but not with any kind of gun he had ever seen or even heard of before.

The paramilitary thugs had used what looked vaguely like oversized, solid-black kids' water guns that shot bursts of crackling energy.

But none of that mattered.

The fact that they had shot him made the normally introverted teen want to tear off the man's head that had pulled the trigger.

However, despite his anger, the strangeness that surrounded the bizarre explosion gnawed at him:

Namely the fact that Will had been sitting right at its epicenter after it had happened.

A cold, shaky feeling of uncertainty began to form in his gut, and thoughts of his time in the 'upside-down', as his friends had called it, began to paint an unsettling picture in his mind.

'Where's my Brother, you fucking pricks!?' he yelled at the camera in

the corner. 'I want to see him! HELLO?!'

No response.

A dull rumble of thunder sounded from above.

'HEY!'

Having had enough, Johnathan climbed up onto his chair, surprised that they hadn't done anything to his legs, and braced his foot up against the table.

With one motion he pushed, just enough to knock the cup of coffee to the concrete below, shattering it, and spilling the hot liquid.

'How about NOW, huh?!'

The large speaker just above the plexiglass observation window to his left crackled.

*'That's quite enough, Mr. Byers'*

Suddenly, the door to the hallway opened, and in stepped Joyce, tears flowing freely from her dark-ringed eyes, followed closely by a grave-faced Hopper.

'Mom?' he said, trying to stand up and failing, having momentarily forgotten about his handcuffs.

Instead, she rushed over to him and smothered him in a desperate hug.

'Oh my God, Johnathan! are you alright?! Did they hurt you? Have you had anything to eat-?'

'I'm fine, Mom. I'm okay' he finally broke her hold after a minute.

'But I can't get them to say shit about Will-'

Jim cleared his throat in a polite attempt to interrupt, taking a breath before he spoke.

'I don't know how to break this gently to your Son, so I'll just come

out and say it: Your Brother's in a lot of trouble'

Johnathan closed his eyes and sighed before opening them again.

'He caused that explosion, didn't he?'

Hopper nodded.

'How? Was it because of whatever it was that happened to him in the upside down, is that it?!'

Jim looked at the observation window.

'Should I go ahead and tell him, Doc?'

The speaker crackled again.

*'So far as the 'recent' event and its consequences are concerned, yes you may. But I'm afraid our DARPA affiliates have made it clear that under no circumstances is the ongoing problem in the basement or anything associated with it to be discussed with anyone who is not connected with this facility, save at the discretion of an authorized representative'*

Hopper clenched his jaw and folded his arms.

'So in other words, I can drop a goddam bombshell, but I have to leave the closest thing to a Father-figure the kid's ever had hanging, is that it?'

'I'm right here, you know!' said Johnathan, tired of being talked about in the third person.

*'No, Chief. 'you' don't have to do anything, as I will be there shortly'*

'Huh' said hopper, mild surprise in his voice. 'Didn't expect that from you, Sam'

The speaker crackled again.

*'Before I get there, I need you to understand something, Mr. Byers: this is not a courtesy, nor is it an act of charity. The information I am about to share with you can never leave this facility on pain of death. Do I make*

*myself clear?'*

Johnathan nodded, his fiery anger now gone.

'Yeah'

---

Ted groaned and sat up, wincing as he touched the sore spot on the side of his head where he had hit the doorknob after being thrown back by...

...a damn kid?!

How the hell was that even possible? Mike's friend had been at the other end of the room.

What the hell was going on?!

Then he realized that someone beside him had been frantically trying to wake him for some time now, and when he saw that it was Karen, his heart sank.

'Oh thank God, Ted!' she cried, grabbing onto him and sobbing. 'They took him, Ted!'

When he looked around at the concrete cell and didn't see Mike, his heart sank even further.

'They took our Son! I don't even know what they want with him, Oh God!'

After several minutes of trying in vain to comfort his wife, Ted noticed the closed-circuit camera in the corner watching them, and a Father's anger began to build up inside of him.

'What did you do with my Son? Who are you people?! Are you listening to me?!'

Several more minutes passed, and the electronic door to the room buzzed, opening to reveal a man in a Black business suit, followed by another armed with a taser.

'Mr. Wheeler?' he said, clinically.

'I don't know who you are' said Ted, ready to strangle the Man. 'but I want some answers: NOW'

He turned to his armed escort.

'Wait outside'

He nodded hesitantly before he turned around and left, closing the door behind him.

'I'm afraid your Son, Mike is involved in something serious, Mr. Wheeler-'

'-I just want to see him, alright? And who are you people anyway?! Who the HELL do you all think you are, barging into someones home and arresting them without a warrant?!'

The man reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet, opening it for Ted to see.

'Harold Darro, Central Intelligence Agency'

Ted stopped cold.

What did the CIA have to do with any of this?

Had they all woken up inside a Twilight zone episode?!

'I don't understand what's going on, Agent Darro. Why is our Son not with us? And for that matter, where is our Daughter?!'

The portly Man put the wallet away.

'This is a matter of national security, Mr. Wheeler. Your Son is a key witness and a potential suspect in a matter involving terrorism'

Karen nearly fainted, and Ted found that he could no longer speak.

'I need you both to come with me, and see if you can get Mike to talk to us'

---



Claudia Henderson seemed on the verge of having a conniption fit as she hastily dialed the Police, and nothing Dustin had tried could calm her.

Of course, he wasn't doing much better himself after what they had seen.

'He-hello? Hello?!'

Frustrated and worried by the mysterious interference still playing havoc with the walkie-talkie signal, the overweight boy began wrestling with the idea of going to see if his friends were okay, and staying to comfort his Mom.

'I don't care if you're swamped with a thousand other calls! Something is wrong! Everyone HAS to have seen it!'

He elected to try one more time, hoping against hope that he could get through.

'Mike! Come in, Are you there? Mike!'

Still nothing.

It wasn't like Mike to stay quiet for so long.

He next tried Will's, but had no such luck either, though he was less surprised about that, at least.

Finally, his Mother got off the phone, exasperated, and headed straight for the medicine cabinet.

Dustin practically ran to the phone as soon as she was out of sight, and began dialing the Wheelers.

*'We're sorry. The number you have dialed is no longer in service'*

What?

Hanging up and trying again, he quickly redialed their number, sure it was an error.

*'We're sorry. The number you have dialed is no longer in-'*

WHAT?!

What was going on?

'Dustin, honey: I'm-i'm gonna go lay down, okay? Hold down the fort, will you?'

His mouth had fallen open, and nothing his Mom had said registered.

'Dustin? Are you okay?'

'Oh, umm: yeah Mom, I'm fine'

She nodded half-heartedly, and lumbered off to her bedroom, accompanied by Mews.

The minute she closed her door, he was out the front, making a beeline for his bike.

Something was very wrong, and he had to go see Mike, If only to make sure he was okay.

---

Steve awoke from the black void of tranq-induced sleep, feeling almost as limp as a rag doll.

In a corner of the grey cell sat Nancy, head on her knees and crying like a little girl.

The rich kid groaned as he sat up, wanting badly to comfort his ex-girlfriend, but not trusting his own feet to carry him over to her.

'Nancy, wha-what happened?' he moaned, pitifully.

She shook her head, tears streaming down her face.

'They took my Brother away: that's what happened! I don't even know why or what they're doing to him or anything!'

Fighting through the thick fog in his mind, Steve angrily remembered that CIA fucker.

His desire to punch somebody's teeth down their throat had never been stronger.

Then he saw the CC Camera in the corner, and he had thoughts of going over and breaking it, when the door buzzed and opened.

In walked a man dressed in solid black urban combat fatigues and a SWAT-looking helmet, armed with what looked to be an M-16 military rifle.

'You two!' he said. 'Come with me'

Nancy looked up, hate in her eyes, despite the tears.

'Fuck you!' she yelled. 'I'm not doing anything for you, you piece of shit!'

The man was visibly annoyed.

'Miss Wheeler: you 'will' comply'

In response, she took off her right shoe and threw it at him, bouncing it off his head.

'Nancy, you're not helping anything!' said Steve, nervously eyeing the way the Man's grip had tightened on his rifle.

'I'm not going to ask you again, Miss Wheeler'

The door opened again, and a Black man dressed in an official-looking business suit entered behind him.

'I'll take it from here, Soldier'

The man grunted, and left.

'I know you're both angry, and rightfully so' he began. 'But there are serious risks to national security involved here'

Nancy and Steve stared in utter surprise when he stepped into the light, as they both recognized him.

'My Son is good friends with your Brother, Miss. Wheeler, so I figured

it'd be best if i was on the case... if only to try and keep Darro and his goons in line' he said, annoyance creeping into his voice as he muttered that last bit.

'What's going on, Mr. Sinclair!?' said Nancy, wiping tears from her eyes.

'And why are we being detained?' asked Steve.

Just as he was about to speak, however, the PA speaker above them crackled with a bored, authoritative voice.

*'Choose your words carefully, agent Sinclair. Matters of National Security don't normally concern civilians'*

The Man rolled his eyes.

'Bottom line is, you two were involved in something that defies conventional science, and neither the CIA or DARPA appreciates being left out of the loop when it comes to that sort of thing'

Steve leaned back against the wall, sighing.

'I need you both to come with me for debriefing' he said, as the door buzzed and opened once more.

He knew that there had been no way in hell they could all hide their involvement with the upside down for long.

'But first, You'll need to sign a mountain of legal documents'

---

'I know you're listening, Will'

Will had turned to lay on his side, half-heartedly trying to ignore El as he didn't want to see or talk to anyone.

But at the same time, he couldn't bring himself to completely block him off either.

An image of El sitting on the other side of the bed with his back turned appeared in his mind.

'The first time is always the hardest' he said, as if he were truly there, and not merely a mental projection.

'I was seven when I killed my first animal. A Rabbit'

He lay there unmoving, but El knew he was listening.

'I cried for a few days after, but Papa had one of his men smack me. And do you know what he told me then, Brother?'

Weakly, he shook his head.

Suddenly, he found himself staring through El's eyes again.

Right into the eyes of Martin Brenner.

'The weak may live, El: but only the strong can survive'

He leaned down.

'Become strong, or die. The choice is yours'

The vision of a dead world's past ended, and Will still didn't feel any better.

'After that, I believed him. I put everything into showing that there was nothing I wouldn't do to survive. He showed me how to cut myself off, how to harden myself and kill without feeling'

His projection turned, to look at Will.

'But do you know what 'you' showed me, Will?'

The boy slowly turned back over onto his back, an inquisitive look on his face.

'You showed me what it means to 'live'. To be normal. Something I didn't think was worth shit. You showed me that Papa- no: 'Brenner', was wrong'

He nodded, and swallowed.

'I ki-' a lump formed in his throat, and tears began flowing again. He

couldn't bring himself to say the horrible word.

El put a non-corporeal hand on his sibling's shoulder and sighed, holding back a wave of his own emotions.

'I know. And I know what you were getting ready to ask.'

A crack of thunder emitted from the unnatural storm above them, and El knew that it had to be stopped...

Sooner rather than later.

'You live with yourself by not turning into me'

Will was sobbing now, and El felt on the verge of joining him.

'Don't ever lose your conscience' he pleaded.

'Please'

## 15. Chapter 13

Mike stared blankly at the table beneath him, head buried in his crossed arms.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he wondered if this was how war-refugees felt:

Helpless.

Hurt.

Betrayed.

As numb as he was, that last, agonizing word still managed to twist his stomach like a knife.

He had been betrayed by two of the best people in his life:

The girl he had feelings for.

And his best friend.

He couldn't bring himself to decide which one was worse.

He just wanted to wake up in his bed, and know that this had all been a nightmare: a cruel product of an overactive imagination.

An icy chill worked its way down his back, causing him to shiver violently.

It wasn't even 'that' cold in the room.

'Awesome' he thought, sarcastically. 'I could 'really' use a cold right now...'

A strange, prickling sensation began to scratch at the back of his mind.

Just as he was about to dismiss it as nerves, however, he suddenly found himself sitting upright and looking frantically around, the

feeling of being watched by someone or something taking hold of and subverting the rational side of his brain.

He felt like he was six again, peeking out from under the covers for the monster at the foot of his bed.

The unfathomable weight of a vast consciousness began pressing down on Mike, threatening to crush his tiny existence into dust, and the prickling sensation began to increase in volume, becoming unbearable to the point of almost causing him to cry out in fear.

Then, all at once, it stopped.

His instincts were telling him to run and hide, but try as he might, he simply couldn't bring himself to move. As if his own body were rebelling against him.

*'Shhhhhh...'*

The soothing, Maternal voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere, like a placid pool of water amidst a stormy, chaotic ocean.

Like a Mother, embracing her child.

'Who...are you?' he asked sluggishly, his mind feeling as if it had been submerged in molasses.

*'Will didn't betray you, Michael'* it whispered in the patronizingly amused way a parent would correct their offspring, evading his question. *'He never wanted to hurt you'*

*'But we both know who did...don't we?'*

Suddenly, he found himself standing on the familiar dirt road that ran behind his house.

At first he was confused, but then he heard voices, and he turned to see Will riding his bike.

*'They're talking about you, little one'* it said.

*'Jussst Lissssstennnn...'*



He could hear them now, arguing back and forth inside Will's mind like disgruntled roommates, and he saw him throw his bike down in anger.

*'...The first time someone holds a gun to his face, or gets between you and him, or gives a choice between his life or yours: he'll choose himself'*

He could feel his anger rising again as he recognized the cold, mocking voice of the 'other' Will: the one that had come from the upside down and wrecked his world.

*'It's not right, is it Michael? To have your best friend stolen away from you by a scheming, murdering, infuriatingly insufferable insect-'*

Thunder rumbled overhead, and It stopped. Mike somehow got the feeling that this 'presence', whatever it was, had some sort of personal vendetta against the entity that had moved into his friend's head.

But then again-

He clenched his fists.

-so did he.

'What...do you want?'

He could feel its quiet, volcanic anger, and he began to wonder if dealing with this being was such a good idea, as it was likely from that same, rotten dimension that had almost stolen his best friend from-

But no sooner had this thought crossed his mind then it was erased, along with all memory of ever having had it.

*'I?' it seethed. 'I wish to see your friend's little helper crushed, broken, and unmade...and from what I gather: you do as well...is that not so?'*

The boy nodded, his hurt and anger overriding his sense.

*'Excellent' it said, the Maternal voice now tinged with a hungry eagerness that Mike found unsettling. 'Here is my offer: Your friend, Will, can be separated from his shadow by my power, and returned to his*

*former self'*

*'All you have to do, child, is let*

*me*

*iiiiiiiiinnn'*

That last, slithering word nearly caused him to panic, but for some strange reason, the fear disappeared as quickly as it had started, and was replaced with thoughts of playing games and watching movies with Will before everything had turned to shit...

...before that ASSHOLE had come between them.

His mouth tightened into a thin line, and his eyes narrowed.

Only for a split-second did he consider the wisdom of trusting a complete unknown before the unthinking impetuosity of youth overrode his caution.

'Fine- FINE!' the adolescent replied. 'If it can get Will back to who he used to be, then I'll do it!'

The chill in the air suddenly spiked, and the Boy could feel something slimy and insidious moving inside his mind.

Too late did he realize that he had made a grave mistake, and as the monster closed its intangible jaws around its prey, his last free thought was of El.

---

El lay sleeping in her cell, trapped in a nightmare.

They hadn't even had to tranquilize her. She had simply devoured the food they had given her like a starving animal and stumbled quietly into the holding-room they had set up for her with the aid of the Men in white coats she loathed, falling out as soon as she had closed her eyes.

Now, she was witnessing what could only be described as hell on earth:

An entire city, burning.

Military Jets roared over her dream-self's head, unleashing incendiary missiles into the streets of the shattered Metropolis.

The terrified screams and cries of tens of thousands of voices filled the air, almost drowning out the thudding of numerous automatic weapons, along with another, chilling sound that was all too familiar to her:

That of screeching, hissing monstrosities that even the sirens couldn't hide.

The so-called 'demogorgons' that Mike and his friends had named.

She didn't have a clear view of what exactly was going on as she was standing amidst a sea of abandoned cars and fleeing people in the middle of the highway leading out of the City, but she got the feeling that she was seeing through someone else's eyes.

And the voice that called wildly to her confirmed this.

'Jane, come on! We have to run!'

Turning to see who was yelling at her, Subject #11 nearly stumbled backward in surprise.

It was Mike's friend, Will.

But...

'Jane: listen to me!' he said, putting his hands on her shoulders. 'We can't save them!'

...But it wasn't.

Not far down the road, the corpses of a man and a woman were being eaten by two of the vile creatures.

Were 'they' who he was talking about?

'GET. AWAY!' she exclaimed, causing the dreamscape to ripple like a

pool of water that had been disturbed as she tried in vain to break loose.

Suddenly, she got the uncanny sense that she was an actress in a play who had forgotten her lines.

A dark, murderous expression overtook his face, and immediately she realized that this was not a dream.

She had unwittingly intruded on a memory.

'Get. OUT!' he hissed between clenched teeth.

Defiantly she shook her head, fighting down the panic that was trying to build up inside her.

'No'

His grip tightened on her shoulders, and El knew she was in very real danger.

But she had to know the truth.

'Who. 'Are'. You?!

He closed his eyes and took a shuddering breath to steady himself before opening them again.

'I know who 'you' are' he said cryptically, letting go of her shoulders and stepping back.

'Did Papa treat you like his caged fucking pet too, 'Sis?!'-'

El felt her mouth drop open.

'-Because he sure as hell did ME!'

With one, angry motion, the other jerked the left sleeve of his shirt up, revealing the 011 tattoo on his upper wrist.

She shook her head in disbelief at what she saw.

This had to be a trick.

'You STILL don't fucking get it, do you? Do I have to spell it out for you?!'

Breathing heavily and staring with angry, determined eyes, the girl stood her ground.

Growling in frustration, the twisted reflection of Will Byers shut off the memory, leaving the two in an empty, black void.

'I'm YOU, goddammit! And you?-'

El felt her knees begin to shake at what he was implying.

'-You're just a pathetic, lesser reflection of 'me!'

Then, out of the blue, his expression of indignation dropped, and for a brief moment, a hurting young boy was revealed.

'Me...and one other person' he said, almost in a whisper.

But before she could even begin to recover from the shock of what he had just revealed, a horrible, keening screech that was unmistakably psychic in nature sent both their inner-selves reeling.

So strong was the cry that it threatened to tear their unintentional psychic link apart.

Neither spoke.

They both knew from experience where it had come from.

'You want to help Will?!' he said, as they both shielded themselves from the scream.

'Help 'me!'

And with that, he severed the link.

---

Dustin peddled as fast as his legs would allow him, praying that Mike was okay.

It was the first time he had prayed at all after his Dad had died.

The sun was out now, but the obese boy felt no relief from the fact that the storm had dissipated.

The horrible memory of what he had seen in those clouds was still fresh on his mind.

Mike's house wasn't 'too' too far from his own.

Just enough to make him sweat, which wasn't all that hard to do.

'Son of a- bitch!' he huffed. 'This is why i- swore off- exercise!'

It was late afternoon now and knew he had to hurry if he wanted to get home before dark.

Hopefully, the two of them could figure out just what the hell was going on-

Dustin's mouth dropped, and he went tumbling as his bike hit the curb.

Mike's house was in ruins.

## 16. Chapter 14

Sam Owens had been a practitioner of Psychology for the better part of the last twenty-three years.

He had interviewed patients with every condition from multiple personalities to parental/sibling-related complexes.

There was little he hadn't seen in both his time in the field, and his later years working for the Federal Government, and it was this experience that told him that Will Byers was hiding something.

He had slipped during Sam's brief visit to his room, during which he had grilled the boy concerning the explosion that had undoubtedly been psychic in nature, and in the heat of the moment, had inadvertently caused him to use the term 'He' instead of 'I'.

This, of course, would have gone unnoticed by Owens, as there had been multiple people involved in the whole ordeal, including his friend Michael, and the valuable escaped subject number eleven.

However, he had referenced this 'he' while they were on the subject of what Will had been doing on the way 'to' his friend's house, though he had immediately moved to correct himself.

Running the conversation over in his head once again as he made his way down the hall flanked by three Federal Agents, each carrying a veritable mountain of legal documents for the Byers' to sign, the veteran-shrink took extra care to analyze young Will's exact words:

*...I need an answer, Will'*

*The boy had adopted a deer-in-the-headlights look, his chest heaving faster and faster, the ECG monitor registering a significantly increased heart-rate*

*Owens sighed. He hated having to push someone so young so hard, especially a child who had just been informed of something so devastating as guilt of murder, unintentional or not.*

*Nevertheless, he knew that one of the best times to get the truth out of*

*someone was when they were in the middle of a crisis, and after twenty-plus years of 'following his nose', so to speak, it was now telling him that every single one of their previous sessions had been bullshit.*

*He then decided to switch tactics. Oftentimes, suddenly altering the direction of the conversation could cause people to slip and say something.*

*'Tell me, Will: what were you doing on your way to Michael's house?'*

*'I-'*

*He swallowed.*

*'I was j-just riding my bike an-and he wouldn't sto-!'*

*Owens cocked his head in curiosity.*

*'Who is this other person, Will?'*

*He shook his head desperately.*

*'I mean, uh... I couldn't stop and I fell off my bike!'*

*The Doctor simply nodded, knowing full well that he was lying.*

*'C-can I see my Mom? Please?'*

*Owens smiled and nodded, though the smile didn't reach his eyes.*

*'In a bit, Son'...*

Combined with Doctor Klein's unnerving theory, his instinct began to paint an unsettling picture in the man's mind, and not for the first time did he worriedly consider just what 'all' lurked on the other side of the festering portal that they had no knowledge of...

...and what had already come through, undetected.

Sam took a moment to mentally weigh all of the available options for handling psychically-powered individuals, and quickly came to a cold but necessary conclusion:

The Byers Boy needed to be contained, analyzed...



...and unless it was avoidable, removed as a potential threat to the American public should he be carrying any pathogens native to the mysterious, logic-defying parallel-world.

Or worse.

Suddenly, the bizarre storm that had been swirling overhead for hours now unleashed a jolting crack of thunder that could be heard even underground, and the lights began to flicker.

Speaking of other-dimensional malarky, he needed an update on the disturbing atmospheric anomaly in-question, ASAP.

---

Will had always tried to be an optimist.

Not for his own sake, so much as for that of his Mother And Brother.

He had smiled and encouraged them for as long as he could remember, trying his best to give the two best people in his life some small measure of happiness as they struggled just to keep the bills paid, while he sat and watched, powerless to do anything.

Behind the smiles, the laughter and the joking, however, he had been hiding a deep, dark hole, and in it, he had thrown all of his pain; all of his hurt and anger.

He had kept it all bottled up inside for so long, it had all become a part of him, like a hidden nature deep inside.

And it was at that moment, lying in a makeshift hospital room in a hidden Government Black-site that he realized that, more than anything, all of those bottled-up emotions had ultimately been the catalyst for the awakening of his destructive powers.

Whatever they were.

He didn't want to think about it.

Out of nowhere, his muscles spasmed, and Will had to bite his lip to keep from crying out.

El was dreaming again.

It had all started less than a month after they had gotten back from the upside-down. At first, Will had tried to find some way to console his tormented twin, but it soon became apparent that his efforts were in vain.

Nothing could calm the roiling turmoil within him for long. Not after what he had seen and done when he still lived.

Especially not after what all had been done 'to' him.

So intense were El's dreams that Will would sometimes find himself being shaken awake by his terrified Mother, whose fear of losing him again had nearly driven the poor Woman to the brink.

Other times, his own body would convulse, and shatter his sleep - though much of the time this was a mercy, as his dreams up until a month ago had 'all' involved the other world, whereas now, they only 'mostly' did.

'Yeah: 'progress'...' he laughed morbidly.

Suddenly, the strange buzzing he had felt in his head earlier returned: this time with more intensity than before.

The lights began to flicker.

*'WILL, HOLD O-!'*

Before El could even finish his sentence, a roaring, screaming wave of invisible energy collided with him, and he soon found himself clutching his head, screaming along with it.

This was far beyond a physical assault. It was far beyond anything he had ever experienced, including the horrifying ordeal three months ago, when he had almost erased himself from existence.

What he felt now was something altogether worse, and more terrible than even that:

It felt as if some looming, titanic presence was actively trying to rip

his very essence, his 'soul', from his body, and worse-

-that it wasn't even targetting 'him', specifically.

Panic gripped his heart at the realization of what was happening, even as he screamed in agony.

It was 'her'.

She was here.

---

'Mom!' yelled Lucas, trying to keep the worry out of his voice as he made his way downstairs.

'MOM-!'

'Lucas Sinclair! What did your Father and I tell you about yelling in the house?!'

Mrs. Sinclair looked up at her Son, hands on her hips, and unhappy look on her face.

'-To not do it. Sorry' he said quickly. 'May I use the phone, please?'

She folded her arms.

'And 'why', exactly, do you need to use the phone?'

'Because I want to check on Mike, okay?!' he exclaimed, flailing his arms and rolling his eyes.

'Boy, you'd better watch that mouth!' she fired back. 'No way in 'hell' you're going to talk back to your Mother like that'

He sighed and swallowed.

Sometimes he couldn't decide who was scarier when they were angry: his Mom or his Dad.

'Sorry, Mom' he said. 'I just want to make sure he's okay'

Just then, the doorbell rang, followed by a loud series of knocks.

'That's odd' she said to no one in particular 'Who could that be, knocking at my door?'

While his Mother was distracted, Lucas quickly made his way to the kitchen and began dialing Mike's number.

The sound of raised voices caught his attention, and he was about to put down the receiver to see what was going on when a chilling message caused his heart to jump.

'We're sorry: The number you have dialed is no longer in service. Please hang up and try again...'

He tried again, and a cold feeling manifested in the pit of his stomach as he received the same message.

After two more tries, thoughts of the bizarre, fragmented conversation his walkie-talkie had inadvertently picked up on came back to his mind, and he could feel his breath coming in harder and faster.

Something was very, very wrong.

'My Husband works for the Agency! Don't you DARE lay a hand on my Son!'

Wait- What?!

'Mrs. Sinclair, your Son is a potential witness to matters involving National Security. We just want to talk to him-'

'Uh-uh: You can wait til' my Husband comes home and ask 'his' permission! But as long as it's just me, you aren't setting foot in my damn house!'

Lucas found himself backing slowly away towards the Kitchen door, panic overtaking him as he realized what this was all about.

They'd gotten Mike, and now they were here for him too.

---

A loud clap of thunder sounded nearby, but Dustin didn't notice.

His knees were shaking...but not from exhaustion.

The obese boy picked up his bike and hopped on, peddling furiously.

Nothing seemed real at the moment. No matter how many times he stopped to look at the scene before him, he simply couldn't bring himself to accept it.

It 'couldn't' be real.

And yet: it 'was'.

Mike's house was in ruins.

The Police had cordoned off the area, and were too busy keeping the shocked onlookers back to notice him ducking under the yellow tape.

To his relief, there were no ambulances present, but that did little to alleviate the fact that the Wheelers were nowhere to be found.

That didn't make any sense at all to Dustin, as Ted and Karen 'never' left the House.

What the hell was going on?

'Hey you! Get away from there!'

The officer was on him in a heartbeat, but even so, he lacked the will to even attempt to run away.

'Are you listening to me? Step back over the line, ki- wait a minute...'

Confused, Dustin looked up at the Man, and instantly realized that he had made a terrible mistake in coming here.

'Are you Dustin Henderson?'

'I, uh...'

Suddenly, the man grabbed his wrist in an iron grip, and reached for his police radio with his free hand.

'Found one of 'em! What should I do?'

The boy simply stood there, dumbfounded.

This was all the DOE's doing.

## 17. Chapter 14: interlude

The hallway-door opened once again, and a man in a white Lab coat entered the interrogation room, his obviously practiced expression of calm collectedness failing to hide the tiredness in his eyes.

Behind him, three men whose look and dress screamed 'Agent' followed, wordlessly setting down three, massive stacks of legal disclaimers and immediately leaving, save for one.

'Please keep in mind that your status as an Authorized Representative is purely conditional and subject to revocation at Special Agents' Darro or Sinclair's discretion, Director Owens'

Wait...Owens?

Was this the same Doctor Owens who had been Will's Psychologist for the last three months?

'Yes: Agent Darro already made this all perfectly clear to me' he replied and proceeded to sit down in the chair opposite Johnathan, nodding briefly to Joyce and Hopper.

'Before you start signing your life away, Son, I need to be very blunt with you about your Brother-'

Johnathan swallowed and nodded.

'-As Chief Hopper has already told you, Will is in a great deal of trouble: legal and, I suspect, otherwise...'

The storm above them unleashed a crackling rumble, and the teen nervously eyed the fluorescent light above them as it shook and danced.

He had been so pissed off when they had brought him into the building, handcuffed like a prisoner, he had hardly paid any attention at all to the crazy, swirling blackness above him.

It was just one cloud! How the hell was it still there?!

'...and as you've already guessed, the main reason we are all here is because of Will's involvement in the incident at the Wheeler residence'

Owens stared directly into Johnathan's eyes: all pretense swept away.

'Quite frankly, Son: your Brother, through no fault of his own, I believe, has come into possession of an incredibly dangerous power-'

'You shot him' he said, fists clenched and heart rate increasing as his anger slowly built back up. 'You shot my Brother in the **FUCKING HEAD!**'

A horrified expression came over Joyce's face, and Hopper straightened up from his slouched position against the wall, and turned to Sam.

'Was that really necessary, Doc?'

The beleaguered facility Director sighed a heavy sigh.

'I'm afraid it was' he replied, and Joyce gasped.

'We're at war with an unknown enemy from another dimension. We don't know what it's capable of. We don't even understand its physiology. All we know is that anything that goes in doesn't come back out, and whatever comes out is deadly to human life in one form or another'

'Your Son, Mrs. Byers, is an exception to that rule-'

Johnathan looked on the verge of trying to break the chain on his handcuffs, and Joyce felt her breath catch.

'-Somehow, a thirteen-year-old boy survived on his own for three weeks in a toxic, predator-filled parallel dimension without any kind of protection. We need to know how he did it, Mrs. Byers, and we need your help in finding out'

She shook her head, and Hopper silently winced.

'Just let me take him home' she said shakily, knowing that it wasn't



going to happen, but trying it anyway.

'He's been through enough!' growled Johnathan.

'That's enough out of 'both' of you!' Hopper yelled, causing mother and son to flinch at his sudden intensity.

'Now i'm sorry for what they did to Will' he continued. 'But the fact of the matter is that he's a Juvenile who is indirectly responsible for the deaths of four Federal A-'

Suddenly, the lights began to flicker erratically.

Out of nowhere, a high-pitched frequency manifested, threatening to burst the eardrums of everyone in the room and causing them all to cry out in pain...and they weren't alone.

All across the facility, top and bottom, every living thing was suffering the same torture.

It was so intense, Johnathan could only think one, inexplicable thought:

*'Storm!'*

---

El thought she had known what hell was.

The mental, physical, and emotional abuse she had experienced at the hands of 'Papa' from as far back as she could remember had both toughened...and scarred her.

She had survived the mental trauma of being roughly thrown into the isolation room, and left there in maddening silence for days on end.

She had survived the physical abuse of 'correction' at the hands of Papa's men, enduring beatings that would have broken any other child her age.

She had survived the emotional cruelty of Doctor Brenner's psychopathic manipulations.

But nothing in this world could have ever prepared her for...this.

This was like nothing she had ever felt before.

She felt it, deep within her: her very life-force, her soul, was being slowly stripped away from her, and this parasitic thievery afforded her a horrifying vision of its source:

A seething, writhing mass of horror in the sky. Ancient, and hateful in its intent.

She screamed, and fought back with every fiber of her being, drawing on her scanty replenished psychic power to shield her from the beast.

Though she still had her doubts, ultimately, the young telekinetic came to realize the truth as she desperately fought through the haze of pain and agony.

She had been wrong about the being that inhabited Will Byers' mind.

It had 'never' been the enemy.

Suddenly, El spotted a familiar figure outside her cell, unhurriedly making his way down the spartan-corridor, as if what was happening all around him was of no consequence.

Doggedly, painfully, she made her way to the window of her enclosed cell, until at last she was face to face with him.

'M-mike!' she called, pounding on the bullet-proof glass with her fist. 'MIKE!'

In one, awful moment, Mike Wheeler turned to stare at her, and time itself seemed to freeze.

His eyes had turned solid-black.

'NO!' she screamed, psychic visions of a massive, wriggling black tentacle connecting to the back of his head, and going up through the ceiling towards the sky flashing in her mind.

The barest hint of recognition registered. Not on his face, but in his motions as his head twitched ever so slightly...as if he was fighting to even acknowledge her.

'YOU! he suddenly bellowed in an unnatural, reverberating voice that she could feel bouncing off of her chest. 'STAY...AWAY!'

A wave of unstoppable energy suddenly collided with El, and sent her flying back against the far wall of the cell, pinning her.

'Mike!' she called, in vain. 'MIKE!'

Tears of helplessness spilled down her cheeks.

This wasn't something she could fight.

This wasn't something 'anyone' could fight.

She was a child in the hands of a giant. They 'all' were!

At that moment, her feeling of helplessness turned to frustration.

Why was she so useless?!

Then, the frustration gave way to a single, burning flame that quickly built into a conflagration:

Anger.

She had been used, abused, and lead around on a figurative leash her whole life like a pet.

And just when she had found someone who genuinely cared for her, who had showed her a world outside of the tiny prison she had been raised in, a monster had snatched him away.

The girl's face contorted in an expression of rage, and sudden reserves of Psychic energy from deep within her mind flooded into her being, crackling with raw, chaotic power.

'LEAVE!

HIM!

**ALOOOONNNEE-!** El screamed. A scream fueled by the ill-understood supernatural power within her that defied the laws of nature itself.

The near-unbreakable armored glass shattered outward, and Michael doubled over, mouth open in a silent, indescribable agony of his own.

Suddenly, the force that held her against her will slammed the back of her head against the wall, and the exhausted telekinetic fell into deep, dark oblivion.

---

**'No! NO!'** A horrified El exclaimed as he doggedly fought to shield the two of them from 'Mother's' devastating attack, a sickening feeling of morbid terror permeating every fiber of his being as the effects of the neural scrambler weakened his power.

How the hell had she gotten here?! He should have felt it when she came through the gate!

He knew full well what she was doing. He had seen her do it countless times before to countless, innocent people.

Worse still was the fact that he had witnessed the screaming, wailing chorus of thousands upon thousands of men, women, and children being ripped apart by flesh-eating demons, only to be met with a fate even worse as she devoured their very souls.

A mass-sacrifice for the god of his world. A god of destruction and decay, with terrible motives and goals that only she herself knew.

And yet, even as he fought against an all too familiar, near-unstoppable Ocean-tide of raw, primeval psychic malice, the dread-power seemed strangely weaker than he remembered.

Much weaker, in fact.

Still, there was another crisis at hand, and it had taken an increasing amount of El's energy to stave off in the months following their exit from the upside-down:

Will's heart was dangerously close to giving out.

He had kept it to himself for the last three months, but now his attention was focused on it almost 24/7, and 'only' now did his stubborn and deceitful nature allow him to admit that he had made a mistake by hiding it.

His host was living on borrowed time, and it was all his fault.

And now, even 'that' time was being stolen.

Every fiber of El's incorporeal being burned with rage and indignation.

She couldn't kill him, and she knew it.

Every time she had tried to devour him in the past, he had simply utilized her own power and turned it against her, forcing a stalemate until she relented, ever-hating the fact that even the freak mutation that had given him his own, incredibly destructive powers wasn't enough to harm her either.

No, she couldn't kill 'him'.

But unless her attack was stopped somehow, she was going to kill his twin.

---

The small sliver of Michael Wheeler's mind that still retained some measure of freedom raged impotently at the monster he had allowed in, even as the immensity of her very presence threatened to crush his tiny existence.

It had absolute control over everything he did and said now: a cruel, uncaring master dragging its slave forward with invisible chains.

Then he saw El.

Panic seized his heart as he sensed that this 'thing' was deciding if it should kill her.

'No!' he cried into the writhing alien blackness that had once been his mind. *'Don't...hurt...her!'*

A booming, terrifyingly deep 'laugh' rattled and shook every fiber of his inner-being, and the boy fought the alarmed-urge to recoil in fear.

***'Poor, poor little blood-bag!' it mocked. 'Do its primitive hormones give it false courage?'***

He swallowed (or at least, attempted to).

He was an ant negotiating with a boot.

He was a speck of dust standing against the wind.

There was nothing stopping it from murdering them both right here and now.

Nothing...save for the monster's obsessive hatred what was inside of Will.

His heart began to race.

Was he really going to do this to his best friend? He had known that there was something wrong with him ever since he had gotten back from the upside-down. The unhealthy lack of color in his skin, the shortness of breath after the simple act of riding his bike.

Something had happened to him in that place.

He looked over at El, who he had been used to throw up against the wall of her cell.

Could he really stand by and watch this parasite end the life of the girl he loved?

He knew his next words would effectively make him a horrible human being.

He also knew that hers was the only life he could save.

***'Will's...life...for...hers!'*** he strained, staring down his impending doom with morbid courage.

Strangely, it responded with what could only be described as a

confused cocking of the head...as if it couldn't grasp what he was doing.

***'Your nature divides all of you' it stated matter-of-factly, seemingly to itself as much as Mike. 'You do not stand as one. You are chaos, and I am order-'***

Suddenly, El screamed, and a wave of psychic power collided with him, tearing into his mind.

A silent scream of his own manifested as the parasitic connection between him and the devil in the sky was partially severed.

The monster, in turn, roared in pain, shaking the walls and causing light fixtures to fall and shatter from the violent force, slamming El's head into the wall in the process.

The shrieking, nails-on-chalkboard-attack finally stopped...along with the power.

Mike shakily pushed himself up off the floor, straining to see something, anything, in the blackness.

He had to get to El! She was hurt, and-

Suddenly, he felt his arms and legs begin to move of their own accord, and he frustratedly found himself outright staggering blindly down the pitch black hallway, like a puppet.

***'You will do as I command you, pet!' it angrily screeched into his mind. 'Your pitiful little friend is here somewhere! I can taste his power! You will find him, or your precious little conduit will FEED ME!'***

Tears of despair fell from his eyes. El's near-sacrifice had been for nothing!

And yet, the disruption of her absolute control had done something to him.

He could feel its horrifying intentions now, as if he was seeing into the thing's mind, and one, glaring 'thought' stood out like a beacon:

***Must. Return. Soon!...***